

5 ways to create Purposeful Conversations

Kate Huckabay | Chair, Alignment InstituteSM and HOW Activator

Maybe you just walked out of a meeting and didn't feel like you had a conversation. Maybe it felt like all of the oxygen in the room was being taken up by one person, or maybe it felt like a list of dictates from the person with the most positional power, or maybe it felt like the same circular conversation you've been showing up to every week. These kinds of conversations can feel ineffective and inefficient, and just plain frustrating. What's a person to do?

Choosing to create or intentionally show up to a **Purposeful Conversation** feels different because you are taking an active role in collective sense-making and engaging in useful debate toward a common goal. It takes practice to be fully present in a conversation and to role model behaviors that allow for collective decision making or problem solving to develop.

Below are five ways to create the conditions for a Purposeful Conversation.

1 Set the Conditions

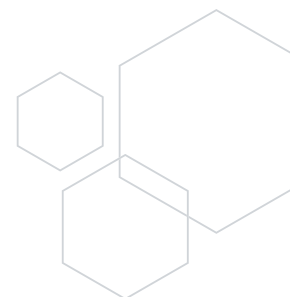
Who's running this show? Take time to define who is keeping the meeting on track and who is responsible for taking action after the meeting. Defined roles help everyone to know their time is important and that there will be follow-up afterwards. Share the intention for your time together and the desired outcome for the conversation.

2 Ask Curious Questions

Hear or here? It is much easier to participate in a conversation where everyone is using the same words to mean the same things. Asking genuine, curiosity-driven questions such as "will you help me understand" and "tell me more" will drive better results rather than defensive questions that shut down the conversation. Focus on listening to understand, not listening to reply (i.e. listen, pause, reflect, then respond.)

3 Engage in Joint Sense-Making

Lecture, lecture, lecture...yawn... Focusing on opening the space for dialogue and creating an opportunity for clarifying questions to be asked gives everyone the chance to make sense of what's being discussed. This may feel like it will take more time, but the result is that everyone can connect the dots and see the bigger picture. And sometimes it may not be the right time or place, but when necessary, make sure it happens.





4 End Endless Debates

***The Neverending Story* was a great movie, but even that came to an end.**

There is nothing more frustrating than endless debates that never conclude.

First, take the time to be clear about who in the conversation has a voice and who has a vote. Second, own the fact that you may be the one keeping the debate going. Third, if it's your decision, be effective at ending the debate. Ask for your colleagues' input and then let the group know that you will be making a decision at the end of the meeting.

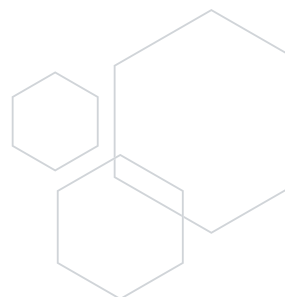
5 Solve the Avoided

Denial is not just a river in Egypt. It takes courage to confront hard problems or call out misaligned behaviors with professionalism. Collective problem solving requires addressing often undiscussed issues. You have the opportunity to role model new ways of bringing uncomfortable topics into conversation.

Start with self and remember that you can create the conversations that will be most in service to you, your team, and your organization.

At the end of the day, you only have control over your own behavior and an opportunity to influence the conditions that create a *Purposeful Conversation*.

If you are the host of a meeting, experiment with one of these five ways. As a participant, be mindful of how you are showing up. In meetings where other people impede effectiveness, follow up with them privately. *Start with Self* and remember that you can create the conversations that will be most in service to you, your team, and your organization.



About the author

KARRIKINS
GROUP



KATE HUCKABAY

Chair, Alignment InstituteSM and HOW Activator

Kate serves as Chair of the Alignment Institute, leads our assessment design and delivery, and is a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach (CPCC) certified through the Co-Active Training Institute. Kate partners with leaders and executive teams, across many industries, guiding them on how to start with self, create clarity, and drive alignment as a team.

Her 15+ years of experience partnering with senior leaders includes helping them to execute ambitious initiatives focused on leveraging employee strengths, creating value for customers, and innovative processes. Kate works with many of our clients and inspires them to action through facilitation both in-person and virtually, engagement design, and executive coaching.



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We are **Karrikins**.

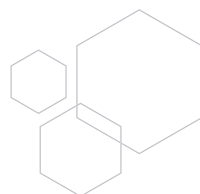
We're world-class facilitators, cultural changemakers, behavioral scientists, and experience creators, but above all, we're people looking to make a lasting and positive impact. With decades of diverse experience in helping companies set ambitious strategies and act on them, our leaders guide our collective impact and enable transformative growth for leaders and teams.

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KG **Dynamic Strategy**

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KARRIKIN (n): *a group of compounds found in the smoke of burning plants that stimulates seed germination and catalyzes growth.*